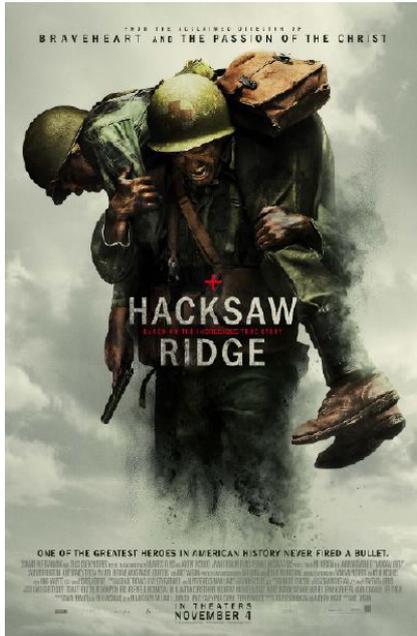


# Hacksaw Ridge

*Engage with culture without disengaging your faith.*



**Genre:** Biography, War

**Rating:** MA 15+

**Length:** 133 minutes

**Starring:** Andrew Garfield, Hugo Weaving, Teresa Palmer, Sam Worthington, Luke Bracey, Rachel Griffiths

**Director:** Mel Gibson

**Screenplay:** Andrew Knight, Robert Schenkkan

## Brief Synopsis

This is a true story and unembellished. Unlike movies like *The Revenant* it is recent, well documented and there are still many living witnesses who experienced these events first hand.

Desmond Doss (Andrew Garfield) was a Seventh-Day Adventist conscientious objector who refused to bear arms on enlisting in the US Army during World War 2. The US Army could not work out why he would enlist in the first place if he wouldn't carry a rifle. Doss wanted to be a medic but army rules said he had to qualify basic training with a rifle before doing his medic training.

He refused on principle citing the commandment "Thou shalt not kill". He was determined to accompany his buddies but to save lives on the battlefield not to take them. However, Doss is imprisoned before being court martialled. On intervention from higher up in the chain of command the court martial charges are dismissed. Doss does his medic training and is sent to Okinawa where the bloodiest fighting in the Pacific takes place. The rest of the film is graphic and gruesome with bodies on all sides being blown apart. The carnage is enormous. Doss, unarmed, saves 75 men single handed. After being severely wounded he returns to the US where he receives from the President, the Medal of Honour, the United States' highest military honour, awarded for personal acts of valour beyond the call of duty. Doss was the first conscientious objector ever to receive the medal.

## Questions for discussion

*Some general questions might provide enough framework to get started:*

- What stood out as the main points/highlights in the movie?
- What themes are explored?
- What assumptions were embedded in the story?
- What challenged you? What questions did it raise for you?
- Are there biblical or theological themes or characters that come to mind?

## Contradictions

Any Army is all about discipline and procedures and uniformity. You all obey orders, you all do the same thing. Armies have trouble coming to terms with diversity and difference. Only after many years has the Australian military started to change its attitude to gender differences; it now admits women to train as fighter pilots and enter combat units and has changed its attitudes to LGBTIQI people. However, it seems the Australian military has a problem with harassment and bullying and much worse surfacing in recent years. Doss endures the same violence from his comrades. Why is diversity such a problem in our society? How does Doss endure it?

## **Family Values**

Doss comes from a conservative SDA community. There is a real community spirit evident. How important is the community and family to those growing up today? Why are our churches so bereft of young people? Why don't they catch the values we espouse or do they express them in another way? Is there still something missing?

## **Violence**

Doss experiences violence in his family. His father (Hugo Weaving) is marred by his experiences in the Great War. All his mates are dead and he visits their graves. Alcohol deadens his pain but makes him violent towards his wife and children. Grown up, Doss confronts his father during a violent rage against his mother (Rachel Griffiths). The event is a turning point in Doss deciding that he will never touch a gun again. Does this response seem realistic? Would we have thought differently and say we need to stop someone who is threatening another even if violence is needed? Is the pacifist response the only real answer?

## **Religion does matter**

Doss is very religious. He observes the Sabbath; Saturday is the day of rest for SDAs. He prays, he carries his Bible everywhere. After their first attempt to take Hacksaw Ridge his unit is repulsed and they are ordered back again to commence their assault on the Sabbath, which is a problem for Doss. When the commander discovers the unit hasn't moved forward he is told that they are waiting for Doss to finish his prayers. They will not move without him. Doss is not afraid to hide his faith. But he does not preach to anyone; it is his behaviour that speaks. What does this say to us? Does our faith make a difference to the way we live? In what ways?

## **Just One More**

Doss prays, "Help me get just one more, Lord." Each time Doss goes out to save a comrade against the odds that he won't survive, he works on the principle "one at a time". We may have challenges that appear too hard to surmount or even deal with. Does this show a way forward? "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes." Matt 6:34 (The Message) Discuss. Also does prayer help? Why?

## **Faith?**

Doss finds himself in the underground tunnels dug by the Japanese. He avoids Japanese patrols but runs into a wounded Japanese soldier. Without hesitation he starts to treat the wounded man as if he was no different from any American. He binds his wound and administers morphine. Andrew Garfield the actor who plays Doss is quoted as saying, "He transcended any idea that there was a good side or a bad side. He was there to serve something greater than himself, something even greater than his army. He was there to serve humanity. This is a good example for us, who are being pitted against each other in this very violently separating culture we find ourselves in." <sup>1</sup>  
Discuss.

1. Sunday Mail, watch (TV guide insert) Oct 23 2016, p15.